Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis 140 (2023): 1–25
https://doi.org/10.4467/20834624SL.23.001.17261
www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Linguistica

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FORMULATING HYPOTHETICAL TALK: AN ACTION-DRIVEN APPROACH TO COMMUNICATING STANCE IN BUSINESS MEETINGS

Keywords: business meetings, formulations, hypothetical talk, stance triangle, evaluation

Abstract

The article focuses on the deployment of hypothetical talk in the CANBEC and CCI corpora of business meetings and examines its use as a discursive tool for communicating stance in encounters where participants represent (potentially) incompatible positions. Through the use of hypothetical talk, interactants signal the potential for agreement and resolution by testing the other participants' position and their preparedness to shift their view. It is argued that although talk introduced to the meeting may be hypothetical, the stance communicated is real. The analysis provides insights into actions applied to resolve impasse or conflict situations, particularly through the rhetorical move of formulating. Formulating aims to resolve or summarize talk at a particular instance in time. The act of formulating requires an evaluative step on the part of the participants in order to consider their contributions or their opposition to the formulation. It is, therefore, of interest to examine how talk that is known to be hypothetical – hence essentially unreal, speculative, potentially untrue or even counterfactual – can be allowed to feature in meetings discourse and to influence a meeting's outcome. Two theoretical models were applied to understand this – Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" and Hunston's (1989, 1994, 2011) three functions of evaluation. These offered a new perspective on the role of hypothetical talk in business meetings, where, as the results demonstrate, hypothetical

talk is used to signal stance, test that of the other participants, and advance the speakers' goals. By integrating the two models and applying them in order to understand how hypothetical talk is formulated in business meetings, it was possible to conceptualize the process through which meeting participants evaluate and act upon talk, by making "real life decisions" upon information which has initially been introduced to the meeting as hypothetical.

1. Introduction

In spoken interaction, where participants constantly monitor the utterances of co-participants and from them develop their own conversational contributions, stancetaking and evaluation ultimately determine the trajectory of the entire interaction. John W. Du Bois (2007) – a professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and an active proponent of the theory of stance – asserts that through their stance the interactants assign value to what has been said, position themselves in the interaction, gauge their alignment with others in the conversation, and invoke the frame of ideology that will subsume and affect the interpretation and understanding of all that is said next. An insight into the formation of stance in interactions, therefore, informs us of what participants in a conversation do during an interaction. In more general terms, it also illuminates what "passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 15).

Meetings create a milieu in which participants need to be able to understand the position and stance of those within the conversation if they are to progress jointly towards the meetings' goals and achieve organizational action. Being able to moderate one's contributions to offer relevant and valued information can assist the participants in achieving this. Being able to understand the contribution of others, how they communicate their stance and interpret these signals is a key management skill.

Interestingly, hypothetical talk, that is talk which is known to be potentially untrue or not real (e.g. Mayes 1990; Myers 1999), is a frequent discursive resource in business meetings.[1] Although it has been established in research that hypothetical talk can be used by meeting participants to explore ideas which may lead to institutional action without these ideas being immediately dismissed out of hand (Koester 2014; Koester and Handford 2018), the formation of stance through the use of hypothetical talk in business meetings has not been explored in depth. Yet, having

1 Specifically in business meetings, Koester (2014) and Koester and Handford (2018), confirm the frequent use of hypothetical reported speech (HRS), i.e., reported speech that is framed as hypothetical. The researchers argue that "HRS is used strategically in professional contexts, often by senior employees, not only to persuade others but also to bring about change in action relevant to the professional practice of the organisation" (Koester and Handford 2018: 67). Additionally, they established that hypothetical reported speech tends to be embedded within a three-phase sequential pattern, Frame shift – HRS – Evaluative summary (Koester 2014: 36–37), in which the evaluative summary is often performed by formulations.

examined data from two business meetings corpora – the one-million Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC) and transcripts of meetings (125,628 word tokens) from UK-based Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), we continually observed that in business meetings hypothetical talk was employed to invite other participants to evaluate the utterance, come to a possible conclusion regarding the speaker's stance on the point under discussion and, if appropriate, reach a decision concerning the potential of future negotiation. This was discursively often manifested through the use of formulations framed as evaluative assessments. If accepted, the hypothetical talk became part of the pool of knowledge or information available to all the participants to draw on as the meeting progressed and moved towards action. In the act of evaluation, the participants also began to consider their stance towards the object of the discussion and through their utterances they began to reveal their own stance on the matter. Linguistically, it is, therefore, intriguing to explore the mechanism through which hypothetical talk enables participants to informally signal their stance or position on a particular matter or indeed their preparedness to move from this negotiating position without directly committing to it at a particular point in time.

To examine the grounds on which hypothetical talk communicates stance, this paper introduces two sets of authentic business meetings data and subjects them to interpretation through the lens of two theoretical models – Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" and Hunston's (1989, 1994, 2011) three functions of evaluation. While Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" has the capacity to account for the interactional dynamism of dialogic or multi-party stancetaking, Hunston's evaluation model provides the capacity and flexibility to evaluate multi-party talk in meetings along each of its three status-value-relevance functions, even if the talk was delivered as hypothetical.

In summary, in this article we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the analysis of hypothetical talk and its close relationship with the discursive practice of formulations inform the creation and communication of stance in business meetings?
2. Do the two theoretical models applied, that is Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" and Hunston's (1989, 1994, 2011) three functions of evaluation, advance our understanding of how stance is communicated in business meetings?

To address these, the paper has the following structure. Sections 2 and 3 provide an account of the data examined and the methodology applied. The methodology section further explains and delimits the manner in which the four key concepts are drawn on and integrated in this paper: hypothetical talk, formulations, stance and evaluation. Section 4 introduces Du Bois's (2007) "stance triangle" and applies it to the analysis of the CCI data. Section 5 summarizes Hunston's three functions of evaluation and aligns Hunston's (1989, 1994) model with Du Bois's stance triangle. It is at this point where the idea of evaluation and interactional stancetaking is developed through a case study examining the sequential use of hypothetical talk and formulations in the course of a single CANBEC meeting. Discussion and conclusions follow.

2. Data

The analysis in this study draws on two datasets of business meetings: the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC),[2] a one-million-word corpus of business interactions (primarily face-to-face meetings, 57 in total), and a United Kingdom-based Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) meetings data, a corpus of 67 internal meetings recorded longitudinally over a year (all face-to-face, eight hours / 125,628 word tokens transcribed). The purpose of the meetings was to accomplish objectives within a business or professional context.

Hypothetical talk comprised a feature extensively exploited in the business meetings in both datasets. As reported in Koester and Handford (2018: 71), hypothetical reported speech (HRS) occurred in over 80% (46 out of 57) of the CANBEC meetings. Similarly, in the CCI data hypothetical talk was found in 19 out of the 22 meetings transcribed, including HRS and scenario building. Hypothetical talk was deployed strategically and occurred in those sequences of talk where its functions directly underpinned the business-oriented goals of the respective encounters. This included adopting new views, changing policies, establishing authority or professional credentials, providing evidence and making decisions.[3]

In this paper we introduce sequences of talk from two meetings. The first is a team's performance review conducted between the Chamber of Industry Deputy CEO and one of the Chamber teams. This dataset specifically illustrates how meeting participants take the opportunity to formulate organizational action on the basis of hypothetical talk and how – through the use of formulations – talk, which has initially been introduced to the meeting as hypothetical, is transformed to specific meeting outcomes. The second dataset draws on a CANBEC senior management meeting. This is presented as a case study to introduce Hunston's status-value-relevance evaluation model and integrate it with Du Bois's stance triangle to inform how hypothetically-structured multi-party sequences of talk contribute to the formation of stance as it evolves in the course of a single meeting.

3. Methodology

Methodologically, we use the term "hypothetical talk" (HT) as an umbrella term to refer to two types of discourse phenomena: hypothetical reported speech (Myers 1999; Koester 2014; Koester and Handford 2018) and hypothetical scenarios not involving a speech report. Examples of HT as it occurs in the meetings data include:

Extract 1: Hypothetical Talk – data examples (frame shifts signalling the launch of HT are underlined, HT is in *italics*)

a) So if you were contacting me, *(0.3) uhm (0.3) and obviously everybody's time is precious, and you wanted to nick my time, …* (CCI, ITA05 – telesales campaign)

2 Copyright Cambridge University Press. Project directors Professor Ronald Carter and Professor Michael McCarthy. See Handford (2010).

3 Here we support the findings reported by Myers (1999) and further by Koester and Handford (2018: 77) in that "the functions of HRS are intrinsically linked to the professional context".

b) … as part of the script that I would develop, is it for me all right for me to be saying, *uhm that maybe you're a sign-post mechanism to (0.3) help /support ? funding/ that could be available?* (CCI, ITA05 – telesales campaign)
c) Well what he w– – says is *that it should be one way. That's the standard. That's what we should be doing and then he you know he /?/* er */??/ (1 sec) sometimes stand that way, Sometimes stand that way. Sometimes you stand that way* (CANBEC, Hotel Standards M05)
d) ⌊and say *"Well how the hell are they supposed to fill it in if you don't send them the guidance notes"* and they say *"Oh we don't know where the guidance notes are"'* … (CANBEC, IT ISP company M10)

The examples illustrate that the use of HT in business meetings is typically to model situations, formulate counterarguments, and sketch out a situation and its consequences for the sake of an argument (Myers 1999; Koester 2014). Extracts 1a and 1b are from a meeting with an external contractor, an individual involved in telemarketing, who is trying to agree with the team the strategy for the marketing campaign her company will undertake on the team's behalf. By framing her thoughts hypothetically, she is proposing the ideas and vocalizing them as scenarios of future conduct. Extract 1c is from a hotel business meeting where the discussion centres on maintaining corporate standards. The basic problem is that the staff are repeatedly failing to meet the standards set down by Head Office when they make customer wake-up calls. The reported talk is used as a vehicle to illustrate the inconsistency of the staff in adhering to the hotel's standards. Finally, extract 1d is effectively a monologue where the Sales Manager complains that his team fail to correctly complete the sales booking process and imagines the types of conversations he would have with them in order to resolve the problem. By imitating a conversation between himself and one of his team members, he is perhaps rehearsing a future conversation in which he would address the issue. None of these examples is out of the ordinary and together they document the routine use of hypothetical talk in meeting conversations.

Linguistically, Extract 1 also stresses that HT is typically signalled through the use of an introductory phrase, namely a hypotheticality marker (underlined), such as "If you say", "somebody saying" or other reporting verbs or quotatives which assist in vocalizing thoughts or playing out ideas.[4] As Koester (2014) points out, hypothetical reported speech is typically used to imagine what the addressee might say rather than function as a report of a previous conversation; by implication it may not necessarily be based on information which is accurate or real.[5] It is, however, the "frame shift" (Goffman 1974) which signals the move to the realm of hypotheticality and alerts

4 See Koester and Handford (2018) for an overview of the distinct HRS introductory patterns identified in CANBEC.

5 This argument resonates with observations made in the research of reported talk or talk framed as dialogic where the authenticity and accuracy of what has been said is skewed by the import to a different context in which the talk is being reported (e.g. Voloshinov 1971; Tannen 1989), the ability to repeat verbatim the words of others (e.g. Lerner 1989; Holt 1996, 2016; Clift and Holt 2007), or the eventuality of completely creating a fictional dialogue (e.g. Myers 1999; Pascual 2014).

meeting participants to the implausibility or even counterfactuality of the utterance. By doing this it creates space for the delivery of a hypothetical idea or a proposal.

In addition to hypothetical talk, the use of formulations was tracked in the data. Formulations manifested the means for "the collaborative assembly, maintenance, and transformation of the sense of sections of talk" (Heritage and Watson 1979: 159).[6] Analytical attention was, therefore, placed on those sequences in which formulations were identified as directly converging with hypothetical talk. Through their fixative and transformative properties these formulations were assumed to indicate key points in the meeting where a course of action-in-interaction was implemented through talk (Schegloff 2007).

Formulations are used pervasively in talk as through formulations speakers constantly display a sense of the practical actions in which they engage. The action-driving force of formulations derives from their unique properties not only to summarize past talk but also to edit and transform what has been said, or project a new sense based on what has been said so far (Heritage and Watson 1979). In their original paper, Garfinkel and Sacks (1970: 350) postulate that formulating a conversation means to "describe that conversation, to explain it, to characterize it, or explicate or translate, or summarize, or furnish the gist of it, or take note of its accordance with rules, or remark on its departure from rules". Heritage and Watson (1979: 123), who subsequently refined the description of formulations in conversation, further assert:

> The introduction of a formulation enables the co-participants to settle on one of many possible interpretations of what they have been saying. They may thus be provided with the sense that they were indeed involved in a colloquy which was self-explicating, i.e. which contained and subsequently revealed its sense to them (and presumably could do so for others).

In studies of authentic, and especially institutional and workplace interaction, formulations are, therefore, a well understood discursive strategy as they enable participants to keep track of what is occurring, confirm their understanding of a particular part of the meeting's interaction, or indeed create a summary of what they believe to be the key points and actions.[7] In business meetings, action is most notably associated with the making of decisions, or it aligns with those points in the meeting where participants offer a verbal summary or assessment of what has been said so far. Formulations are entirely suitable for this purpose and have been found to systematically perform three types of actions in business meetings – sense construction (responsible for the retention of key messages), formulating proposals (specify

[6] As a discursive practice, formulations are used to accomplish the "summarising, glossing, or developing the gist" of the previous talk (Heritage 1985: 100). They are employed to signpost the progression of a conversation, summarize the speakers' understanding up to a specific point in time, or project a new meaning implied from the preceding discussion. In relation to the previous talk, formulations "manifest three central properties: preservation, deletion and transformation" (Heritage and Watson 1979: 129). This renders them highly implicative for subsequent talk or prospective decisions.

[7] For a review of formulations research in workplace and institutional settings see Lohrova (2015). For a sketch of specific interactional properties of formulating associated with certain institutional settings see Drew (2003).

a course of action that the speaker determines to be appropriate), and formulating action points and decisions (transform talk to organizational action).[8]

Importantly for the understanding of a meeting's outcome, formulations are firmly embedded in the turn-by-turn unfolding of the meeting, are driven by the purpose of the meeting, and discursively are tied to extended stretches of meetings talk. That is, formulations have text-organizing properties through which speakers give information about what they know and convey their values and opinions. These specific features link formulations directly with evaluation; in our case, with the evaluation of hypothetical talk, and by inference communicate the participants' stance in the meeting.

Following conversation analytic (CA) principles, the data analysis adopted a close approach to embrace both the sequential and communicative properties of formulating HT in business meetings. In our methodological standpoint we align with Schegloff's (2007: 231) view that it is necessary to study sequence structures as these result from the convergence of "implementing a course of action-in-interaction through talking, and the structures of talking".

In order to understand how hypothetical talk and formulations assist in the communication of stance in business meetings, we adopted Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle as the model has the capacity to account for the interactional dynamism of dialogic or multi-party stancetaking. As pointed out by Englebretson (2007: 2), stancetaking is firmly embedded in the pragmatic and social aspects of human conduct; its nature is "heterogeneous and multifaceted". In agreement with Englebretson (ibid.: 3) we further support the view that any attempt at the understanding and interpretation of stance will always foreground "the situated, pragmatic, and interactional character of stancetaking", which is possibly why the lack of a consistent definition of stance prevails.

To unify the conceptions of stance, Englebretson (2007: 14–15) examined the reflexive relationship between stance as a concept and, more generally, stance as a word in the English language, formulating five key conceptual principles of stance:

1. stancetaking occurs on three (often overlapping) levels – stance is physical action, stance is personal attitude/belief/evaluation, and stance is social morality;
2. stance is public, and is perceivable, interpretable, and available for inspection by others;
3. stance is interactional in nature – it is collaboratively constructed among participants, and with respect to other stances;
4. stance is indexical, evoking aspects of the broader sociocultural framework or physical contexts in which it occurs;
5. stance is consequential – i.e., taking a stance leads to real consequences for the persons or institutions involved.

Drawing on these five key principles, the analysis of stance presented in this article primarily addresses the interactional nature of stancetaking as it develops and

8 Documented by Lohrova (2012 and 2015).

is communicated in the course of business meetings. In other words, we are principally interested in how meeting participants conversationally build on each other's contributions, specifically the use of HT, in their attempt to construct knowledge and achieve their objectives. Stance for us, therefore, is a verbal manifestation of a professional (or sometimes personal) attitude, belief or a position on the matter at hand which may impact the meeting either positively or negatively depending on how the recipients are aligned in relation to the utterance and to each other.

Following Du Bois (2007: 163), we interpret stancetaking in interactions as an action, or rather as a combination of three acts in one: evaluation, positioning, and alignment. These three different types of stance all contribute to the forming, understanding and interpretation of stance. According to Du Bois (2007: 163), the actual stance act is subsequently operationalized through three simultaneously enacted kinds of stance consequences, "In taking a stance, the stancetaker (1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (usually the self), and (3) aligns with other subjects".

Finally, Hunston's (1989, 1994) model of evaluation, introduced in her doctoral thesis, has a degree of resonance when evaluating discourse including that of hypothetical talk. The approach employs a methodology in order to understand how, through their interactions, meeting participants orient to a particular position or stance. In particular, it helps shed light on understanding the evaluative functions of formulations during the progression of meetings and on reaching a business conclusion. Although Hunston developed her model while undertaking an analysis of scientific research articles, the notion of evaluation as a function or activity renders it highly interactive and directly relevant to the analysis of workplace interactions.

Conceptually, there are clear similarities between Hunston's three-function model and Du Bois's stance triangle, which relies on an evaluative action by the speakers regarding the object of the interaction in order to form their own opinion and stance – and in doing so negotiate their relationship to the other speaker. Hunston (2011: 23) observes the interdependence of evaluation, positioning and alignment and maintains that "evaluating something necessarily indicates 'where you and I stand in relation to the object' but also necessarily indicates 'where you and I stand in relation to each other'".

These two positions represent the ideological and interactional aspects of evaluation. They also create the frame for interpretation in the analysis of the data. Aligning with the fine-grained work in conversation analysis, stancetaking was thus interpreted as an activity rather than as a set of markers or expressions (e.g. Schegloff 1996; Du Bois 2007), where the meeting interactions were examined not for what they were about but rather for the action they achieved (Schegloff 2007).

4. Stancetaking in business meetings: Du Bois's stance triangle

This section introduces Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle and deploys it as a conceptual model to assess how hypothetical talk contributes to the formation of stance in business meetings and whether it has the potential to advance organizational action.

Du Bois (2007: 163) defines stance as:

> [A] public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

In a dialogic formation of stance, there are, therefore, three entities: two subjects (the stancetaker, who either through written or verbal interaction communicates their stance, and the recipient of the message), and one object (the utterance or even a stretch of talk shared through communication).

To visualize the dynamic relationships between the three entities, Du Bois proposes a stancetaking model – the stance triangle (Figure 1 below). In the act of taking a stance, two subjects and the object of evaluation form the nodes of the stance triangle and the acts of evaluating, positioning, and aligning represent "the vectors of directed action that organize the stance relations among the three entities" (Du Bois 2007: 164). The evaluative vectors form two sides of the triangle where evaluation is concomitant to the stancetakers' positioning of themselves. The alignment vector completes the third side of the triangle (the vertical line on the left). All the vectors are relational and directed.

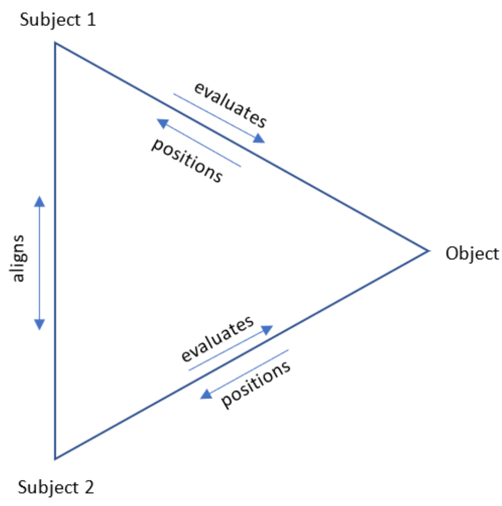

Figure 1: The stance triangle (Du Bois 2007: 163, reprinted with the permission of the publisher)[9]

As will be illustrated below, it is also possible to apply Du Bois's stance triangle to interactions with more than two participants where, through the discourse, the stance of the participants may be elicited. Consider Extract 2a (below):

[9] Permission to reproduce Figure 1 – "The stance triangle" on page 163 of: "The stance triangle", John W. Du Bois in *Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction* edited by Robert Englebretson (2007) – was granted by the publisher John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, Philadelphia https://benjamins.com/catalog/pbns.164.

Extract 2a: Deputy CEO conducting a team performance review – impasse

62 <n Ben> Hello, Maria. (the door closes) (3)

FORMULATION (**bold**)

63 <n Doug> **(F) We're- we are concerned about the pressures that we're getting from (0.4) (name of regional organization), about hitting the targets (0.3) set by (name of national organization), and I just wanted to get some confidence, uh hopefully with you guys, (04:27) that we were going to hit the targets in terms of outputs.** I know we've had a lot of delay, we've lost what three to six months in the lead up to the contract, due to the bureaucracy and the difficulties, getting systems in place, but **(F) we're now stuck with uhm four months left,** [<A> Mhm] **(pp) of the year to try and produce (0.2) the outputs in terms of of (04:47) assists. How likely is it, that you're gonna hit your targets? (3) How unlikely is it you– –** ('you' said in pp, with no real intention to carry on)

64 <n Andrew> I'd say that's seventy per cent likely. (0.9)

In the meeting, Doug, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Deputy CEO, is attending an operational meeting of one of the teams because he is worried that they are not going to hit one of the key performance targets. In turn 63, Doug sets out the scene. He formulates the purpose of his attendance, sets the time frame for meeting the targets and through the unfinished direct question "How likely is it, that you're gonna hit your targets? (3) How unlikely is it you– –" followed by a three-second-long pause he hands over to the team to seek their commitment.

The subsequent interaction in the meeting is tense and has the potential to become confrontational. The team account for why it is impossible to meet the targets. Mutually supporting each other, the team members embed their reasoning in the organizational practice and constraints imposed upon them. Unanimously they signal their withdrawal from the project as no realistic and feasible solution to the problem is readily available.

In employing Du Bois's stance triangle, the object under discussion is the achievement of team targets. At the outset of the meeting, Doug (Deputy CEO) and the team are poles apart and in serious disagreement regarding the achievement of the targets or, indeed, if these were even feasible. The initial position of the interactants may be visually summarized as in Figure 2 below.

As Doug realizes that an impasse is rapidly approaching, he takes a radical approach; he uses hypothetical talk to engage the team and to stir them into action; Extract 2b (Turn 95, below).

Extract 2b: Deputy CEO conducting a team performance review – removing constraints

FORMULATION (**bold**)

MARKER OF HYPOTHETICALITY (underlined)

HT (*italics*)

95 <Doug> [Sorry], well not necessarily, well yes, **(F) you can come up with a pile of strengths but I mean it's really what can I do to help you guys, help achieve the targets.** [<B> Mhm] And it's– – and, you know, let's think about possibly *breaking the rules, this is an enormously bureaucratic– –. [<A> Mhm] and if we can bypass the rules, break the rules, or ignore them, or throw them out, and we can achieve the outputs by doing so, that's fine!*

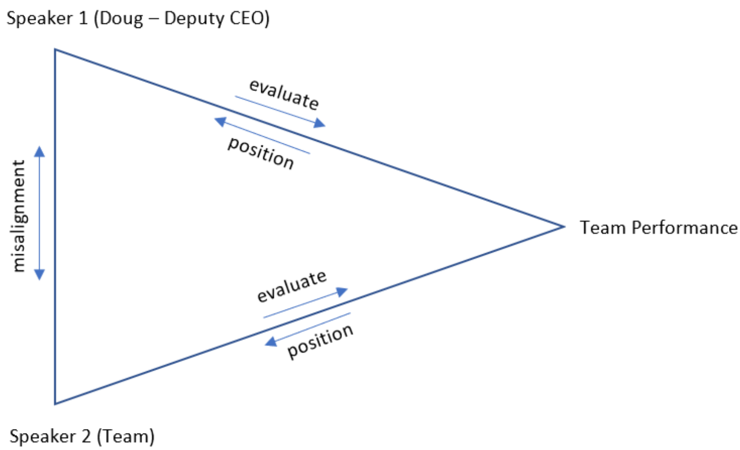

Figure 2: Team's performance review – stance triangle (misalignment)

Although Doug is continuing to maintain and communicate his stance through his initial formulation (bold) in turn 95 – the targets must be achieved, Extract 2b illustrates a clear shift into a hypothetical frame (underlined) – <u>And it's– – and, you know, let's think about possibly</u>. The CEO's hypothetical proposal (in *italics*) *breaking the rules, this is an enormously bureaucratic– –. [<A> Mhm] and if we can bypass the rules, break the rules, or ignore them, or throw them out, and we can achieve the outputs by doing so, that's fine!* effectively suspends reality and has the effect of unblocking the impasse. This single turn teleports the conversational focus of the team from defending their position to totally dispensing with constraints, whatever they may have been. Interestingly, the team do not challenge the Deputy CEO on the legality and implausibility of the hypothetical instruction, although it was clear the Deputy CEO, as the guardian of the company's honesty and integrity, could not seriously envisage this happening.

Instead, they are galvanized into finding solutions. In alignment, the team members start speculating on possible actions, as the ensuing discussion demonstrates (Extract 2c presents 9 non-sequential turns focussing on addressing the issue)

Extract 2c: The team thinking creatively

106 <Andrew>	I mean, one– one smaller issue *which might be easy enough to put into place*, …
110 <Andrew>	Yeah, yeah, *I think that might be an idea*, …
112 <Roxanne>	[Some PR]. …
114 <Andrew>	Yeah, PR, [[a good way of marketing, yes]]. …
117 <Kevin>	Targeted marketing, *probably*, yeah? …
123 <Mike>	[And Chamberlink is gonna– –], …
126 <Andrew>	*And that could probably* up our core services as well …
128 <Mike>	Yeah we're gonna – – …
131 <Roxanne>	*We could do.*

In other words, the team are prepared to create a new reality for meeting the targets as the constraints of bureaucracy and the lack of resources have been removed. Moreover, by conveying their values and opinions speakers also communicate their stance on the matter under discussion, which in this case is that of proactivity and action.

Using Du Bois's stance triangle, at this stage of the meeting, the alignment of the interactants may be represented as in Figure 3 below. The team begin to evaluate the situation from a different perspective with a notable shortening or coming together of the alignment vector.

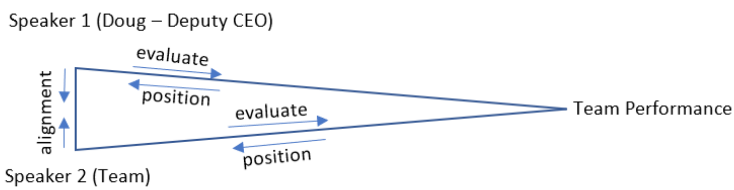

Figure 3: Team's Performance Review – stance triangle (change of alignment)

As an outcome, a marketing campaign is agreed. The discussion closes in Turn 176 in which Doug formulates the meeting's outcome and re-states the need to achieve the targets. Literally, he re-imposes organizational reality, which is effectively where the meeting started.

Extract 2d: CEO formulating the meeting's outcome

176 <Doug>	[leave you with a thought that], it's not about chivvying you up, **(F) [<R> Mhm] it's about saying, is there anything I can do to help you guys meet– –, you know, hit the targets, [<A> Mhm, ok] [<B> Ok (pp)] and any quick wins any– any quick fixes please let me know.** Ok, thank you very much, that was all. And while I'm here, while you remember, do you want to throw things at me or– –

In data Extracts 2b and 2d, the opening and closing positions of the Deputy CEO were communicated through the act of formulating. Doug's stance remains unchanged: the targets must be met; he has, however, discarded the idea of breaking the rules and this has been dropped from the conversation. The stance of the team's participants has moved from "it is not possible to achieve the targets" to working out "how can we achieve them".

As illustrated, it is possible to use Du Bois's stance triangle with multiple participants and plot them on the speakers' alignment axis. This axis is also dynamic in that it changes as the discussion continues and evolves either to bring the participants into alignment or, indeed, drive them further apart. Analytically, Du Bois's stance triangle is, therefore, useful in embracing the interactional dynamism of dialogic or multi-party interactions as it assists in charting the evaluative processes and the relationships between the interactants. It, however, must be underlined that an analytical conclusion about an individual stance – unless the person explicitly declares what their stance is – can only be inferred. To gain an insight into how positioning and alignment evolve during interaction, it is the analysis of the act of evaluation, and specifically of the discourse constituting it, which must be carried out, i.e., an argument consistently upheld by Hunston and applied to the meetings data below.

5. Stancetaking in business meetings: Hunston's three-function model of evaluation

During interactions participants are continually reviewing their position. They evaluate both what has been said by their co-participants and the "scene" behind that. They decide how they think or feel about that, i.e., what their stance is. In the case of hypothetical talk, the direct course would be to dismiss the initial utterance as being hypothetical and to reject it out of hand, but in meetings this rarely occurs. The question becomes whether HT, although it is known to be at least potentially inaccurate, or at worst wholly fanciful, can, therefore, be used to inform an action-driven approach – enabling participants to both communicate and understand the stance of their co-collaborators. If this is the case, on what grounds?

As Hunston (1989, 1994, 2011) postulates, the evaluative act proceeds through three moves that correspond logically to the mental process of evaluation: 1) identification and classification of an object to be evaluated; 2) ascribing value to the object; and 3) identifying the significance of the information. These three moves – object, value and significance – form the three functions of Hunston's evaluation model: status, value and relevance.

The status function makes an object out of propositions and operates on the scale of evaluation, *certain – uncertain.* As Hunston maintains (1994: 195), "The status of a proposition shows the writer's perception between the proposition and the world. A fact represents the world, an interpretation or a hypothesis represents a possible world". By implication, facts unlike hypotheses are hard to be denied.

The value function is a judgement enacted by each of the participants along a *good – bad* axis. It represents an assessment of worth or value given to "both objects external to the text and to propositions in the text" (Hunston 2011: 22). The value function specifically, and evaluation more generally, may not always "be realized by a set of discrete items but is pervasive, cumulative, and perhaps implicit" (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 306).

Finally, the relevance function has a text organizational role. It occasionally marks the relevance to the discussion of extended stretches of text. In written discourse, these stretches typically correspond to paragraphs, and in spoken interactions to discussion points. The evaluation of relevance operates on the scale of *important – unimportant* and the nature of relevance "may be stated in a Relevance Marker" (Hunston 1994: 198). The Relevance Markers typically occur at the beginnings or ends of units.

We argue that even in the case of hypothetical talk it is possible, through the examination of the participants' discourse, to determine the stance of the speakers towards other individuals, the situation under discussion or the information they are discussing. The case study, therefore, explores how Hunston's status-value-relevance evaluation model and Du Bois's stance triangle may be applied jointly to the analysis of stance as it evolves in the course of a single meeting.

The data – Extract 3 (a–f) – from which we draw the case study to develop our hypothesis is a CANBEC meeting which records a discussion of the organizational issues and problems shared between three managers: the Technical Manager (male), in the transcripts identified as <S1>, the Finance Manager (female), identified as <S2>, and the Sales Manager (male), identified as <S3>. All three are British and fall into the age group of 30–39. They work for a large Internet Service Provider company and have an established, collegial relationship. The meeting is internal, scheduled, totalling 19,969 words, and 1,976 turns. The meeting discourse may be described as remarkably rich, with the problem-solving[10] approach continuing through much of the meeting's discussions. Both hypothetical talk as well as instances of business narrative through which the speakers shared their experience, views, observations, and even values are featured.

To open the discussion, consider the first data extract presented below. It reports on a business encounter that is shared by Speaker 2 (S2) with her colleagues. The exchange occurred at the outset of the meeting as part of the managerial chit-chat often present at the beginning of business meetings. It may either be considered as a distraction, or received as a humorous prelude, as in this case, in a relatively light-hearted manner that demonstrates the collegial relationship between the interactants. Discursively, the business narrative centres on the use of direct reported speech,[11] which – much like hypothetical talk – might not be wholly accurate and is ascribed by the speaker to another person.

Extract 3a – Free Press Stroppy Lady (CANBEC M10)

T25	<S2> Then /about free press/ came up to me. Really stroppy big sort of lady came up to me and said "Why don't we ever get any copy from you?" you know in a sort of South African accent. And I said "/Darling/ who are you?" (laughs) And I was talking to the /Doyle Grant / lady
T26	<S1> ⌊Yeah.
T27	<S2> ⌊Then er– – what sort of s– – quarter to eight in the morning it's not really sort of conducive to you know erm er being awake.
T28	<S1> Politeness.
T29	<S2> But er– – Yeah quite. She said "I never get any copy from you". I said "Well probably cos you charge us for it. It probably costs to go in your business news".
T30	<S1> Mm.
T31	<S2> So she said "No it doesn't". She said "Why haven't you got anything good to say about yourselves recently?" I said **(F) "Well contact my marketing manager and she'll be able to say". (F) So I thought oh well fine.**

[10] On problem-solving see e.g. Hicks (2004) for approaches and general patterns, and Willing (1992) for a discourse-based study.

[11] See Clift and Holt (2007: 5) for a review of previous research on reported speech (RS) in English.

So apparently according to the /Doyle Grant/ lady who's the m– – sales marketing director for /Doyle Grant/ she says she's really good. But she thinks she i– – She was taking notes of course to put an article in the /??????/.

T32 <S1> Yeah.

T33 <S2> But erm she said "No we don't charge"' she said "we are desperate for good edit and copy". I said "Well we've just got investors in people" and she went "Ugh". **(F) So I was thinking**

T34 (laughs)

T35 <S1> **(F) /Best not to /??/.**

Applying Hunston's status – value – relevance evaluation model (1989, 1994),[12] the status of this speech report has a low score as the recipients have no way of establishing whether the encounter took place or, rather, that it took place as it is reported. Whether the contribution will become a point of action or concern for the meeting participants will, therefore, depend on how the interlocutors interpret its value and relevance.

At this point, however, the value function is driven by a slightly antagonistic tone to the exchange. The emotive lexis in turn 25, begins to unveil the stance of S2 towards the lady from the Free Press – T25 <S2> … Really stroppy big sort of lady came up to me and said "Why don't we ever get any copy from you?". Both the word "stroppy" and the question are phrased aggressively as is confirmed by how the turn continues to unfold – T25 <S2> … And I said "/Darling/ who are you?" … The use of "Darling" is not in this case a sign of affection but rather one of impoliteness, which is further confirmed by the rather rude question "who are you?" In the UK business world, the conjunction of these two phrases would be understood to be slights by the recipient and also that they are intended as such by the speaker.

The exchange of information and its value in Turn 29 is perhaps the justification for inaction in respect of S2 – T29 <S2> But er– – Yeah quite. She said "I never get any copy from you". I said "Well probably cos you charge us for it. It probably costs to go in your business news". It further reflects the negative stance of S2 in that the organization is required to pay for publication. The interjected laughter in Turn 25 as well as the confirmatory moves of S1 in Turns 26, 28 and 30 indicate that the story recipients also are not impressed by how the encounter unfolded.

In turn 31, S2 continues with her story to openly communicate through speech report that her understanding of having to pay for services is mistaken and that in fact the PR woman in the interaction is continuing to challenge her about her company's marketing profile. In the turn, S2 is also voicing her potential antagonist's question – … "Why haven't you got anything good to say about yourselves recently?" – and summarizes this interaction with a formulation proposing the individual contacts her marketing team – I said **(F) "Well contact my marketing manager and she'll be able to say".** S2 through the use of this formulation begins to signal her withdrawal from the conversation.

[12] In a departure from applying Hunston's (1989, 1994) evaluation model line by line to the transcript, a deliberate choice was made to examine stretches of talk to explore the cumulative impact of the interaction. These were treated as analytical units that were, applying the model, assessed on the basis of their core propositions.

S2 brings her tale to an end in Turn 33 with a final extract of directly reported speech. She acknowledges in fairness that her opinion that they had to pay for press copy was incorrect and suggests an article on Investors in People[13] – T33 <S2> But erm she said "No we don't charge" she said "we are desperate for good edit and copy". I said "Well we've just got investors in people" and she went "Ugh".

At the time of the CANBEC data collection (2001–2003) the Investors in People scheme was considered yesterday's news. It is impossible to determine the intention of S2 in suggesting this but from the reaction of the PR lady ("Ugh") it is clear she does not think much of this proposal. Hence, it is this "Ugh" on which S2 closes her assessment of the encounter and starts to formulate her stance regarding what this potential business opportunity may mean for the company. The negative reading of the situation further resonates through the laughter in Turn 34. The formulation of S1 in turn 35 – **(F) "Best not to"** – then confirms the view that it is advisable not to invest any more energy into this potential business initiative, i.e., the encounter is irrelevant. In effect, the participants have evaluated the speech report and decided that it has no relevance to the business of the ongoing meeting.

From the perspective of Hunston's three-function model, the low status, value and relevance scores for this particular contribution, therefore, dismiss any initiative or engagement on the part of the ISP company. This outcome is visually summarized in Table 1 below, which applies Hunston's three functions of evaluation to Extract 3a.

Hunston's Three Functions of Evaluation		
Status	< uncertain ——— certain > < -[] ——————————— >	The status of the information conveyed has a low score. As a speech report, the account is highly subjective and includes contradictions.
Value	< bad ————— good > < -[] ——————————— >	The value S2 assigns to this business encounter is very low which is verbally expressed through the negative stance of S2 towards her interlocutor and her proposal.
Relevance	< distracting – significant[14] > < -[] ——————————— >	Given the topic of the meeting, namely addressing business issues, this may be perceived as a distraction and is likely to have little impact in terms of the meeting's outcomes.

Table 1: CANBEC M10 evaluation – Free Press stroppy lady

Hunston's model of text evaluation, applied to the meetings data and visualized in Table 1 above, provides an insight into the analytical process of evaluation. Moreover, it enables a judgement to be made on the importance of the exchange to the meeting

13 Investors in People (IIP) was a UK national standard introduced in 1991 through which organizations could demonstrate and gain accreditation in how they managed their employees.

and on its future use as the meeting continues. It may be considered that hypothetical talk – similarly to reported speech – would fare poorly in the assessment of status. However, by applying Hunston's model, it has the potential to be balanced or countered by the other two steps (value and relevance) within an overall evaluation. In this extract, however, the entire exchange had no role to play in the ongoing meeting.

Hunston's three functions of evaluation also inform on the stance of the interlocutors and a degree of overlap occurs with De Bois's stance triangle as both models require an evaluative step or steps within the discourse. In both cases it is also the discourse that helps to communicate the tone and stance of the speakers towards both the topic under discussion and towards each other. Although the status of the talk may be uncertain (hypothetical) to a degree, a great deal of information can be gleaned from the participants' utterances. Du Bois's stance triangle is able to draw on Hunston's model in that it acknowledges the need to undertake an evaluation of what is occurring in order to assign a stance or position. Equally, it can enrich Hunston's model on the stance taking of participants and their alignment to each other as the interactions evolve.

Overall, the business meeting was difficult for the three participants; as department managers they were responsible for the efficient running of their teams, and as the meeting unfolded it was clear there were a number of issues which needed to be addressed. The analysis continues to focus on S2, the Finance Manager, and four more extracts are selected in which hypothetical talk combines with formulations.

In Extract 3b, both turns, 896 and 1031, are snippet illustrations of hypothetical talk; S2 is expressing her thoughts regarding attitudes which the staff may or may not hold. She builds imaginary scenarios of the types of conversations she may need to have with staff. Both extracts also act as formulations of the gist of S2's articulated interpretation of the stance that the employees hold towards the customers, the processes, and the paperwork that are or – more importantly – are not in place.

Extract 3b – Customer's my salary (CANBEC M10)

T896 <S2> ⌊attitude's got to be customer. You know "*Good morning this is your salary talking*"

T1031 <S3> Would think "*Hang on the customer's my salary. I'd better think about this*".

Both of these extracts are placed within a long stretch of talk in which the meeting participants are discussing the poor attitude, or possibly stance, of the sales team towards the provision of good customer service anchored in the company's standard operating procedures. The turns also top and tale this particular stretch of the meeting's talk and begin to communicate the stance of Speaker 2 towards the sales and technical teams.

Again, the status of the information is, due to its hypothetical frame and high degree of subjectivity, reflected as uncertain. This reinforces the idea that hypothetical

[14] In the interpretation of the relevance function we have replaced the "unimportant – important" continuum with a "distracting – significant" descriptor, as that creates a clearer notion in the context of business meetings data.

Hunston's three functions of evaluation		
Status	< uncertain ——— certain > < -[] ——————— >	Although the information provided is not disputed, the high degree of subjectivity has a low score on the status function.
Value	< bad ——————— good > < ——————— [] - >	The excerpts are of value to the participants and reflect the need and the challenges involved in changing organizational culture.
Relevance	< distracting —— significant > < ——————— [] - >	Wholly relevant to the discussion and central to the problems the managers are facing. These turns have "text organising qualities" (Hunston 1994) in that they construct the values of what counts as good customer-care practice and in the meeting form points of focus.

Table 2: CANBEC M10 evaluation – Customer's my salary

talk in the first instance is open to rejection or dismissal. In this case, however, the value and relevance of the interaction help to outweigh any objections the speakers may hold. Interactionally, the positive assessment of the value function is signalled through the reactions of S1 and S3 to these conventional pro-business behaviours: in this particular section of the meeting, all three participants are providing examples of poor customer care and the difficulty in changing attitudes.

Extract 3c, which occurs in the middle of the above sequence of interactions, reinforces the message that there are problems in how the organization conducts itself and that these problems perhaps start "at the top of the tree". It further illustrates the evaluation of hypothetical talk, summarized in Table 3 below.

Extract 3c – Last hour of that last day (CANBEC M10)

T896 <S2> ⌊attitude's got to be customer. You know "*Good morning this is your salary talking*"

T965 <S2> **(F) I know the way they work. I work with them every single month on closing a job**. <S=>It's critical that <\S=> Let me tell you John will say "*This is all the systems*" **(F) but I'll tell you what that last hour of that last day the systems go out the window**.

The Finance Manager signals her intention to launch a sequence of hypothetical talk: "John will say". She is not claiming that he has said it but that he would be likely to say it. She is referring to the fact that a process has been laid down which the sales team should follow in order to submit and raise sales invoices. John, one of the two co-owners and director of the business, understands these systems and believes they are fit for purpose and working properly. Hence the Finance Manager's hypothetical talk ("This is all the systems"), when summarizing her and her team's day-to-day experiences, contradicts this. The sales team's monthly bonus is calculated on sales

Hunston's three functions of evaluation		
Status	< uncertain ——— certain > < -[] —————————— >	Although the Finance Manager has a clear view on what John will say, based on her personal experiences, there is a high degree of uncertainty in this projected speech report.
Value	< bad ————— good > < ——————————— [] - >	This is important since John, as the joint MD, has a clear view of how the systems should work.
Relevance	< distracting —— significant > < ——————————— [] - >	The system is not working and needs to be reviewed. The sales team are not following the protocol, but given the language deployed it suggests that John is unaware of this.

Table 3: CANBEC M10 evaluation – Last hour of that last day

invoices raised and on "that last hour of that last day the systems go out the window". This formulation clearly expresses her stance towards the sales team as they break all the rules to raise their invoices.

This short Extract (3c) serves a number of purposes. The opinions and frustration of S2 begin to emerge. However, the evaluation of her stance is reliant on an understanding of the meeting's past discourse and the details they contain in order to reach a full understanding of how S2 has arrived at this point. The status of the utterance still has a low score when considering the certainty of the hypothetical reported speech, but its value and relevance to the business at hand are underpinned by the past talk of the meeting's participants and the general gist of the past discussion reflecting upon poor team adherence to company protocols.

This particular view of the business reality is reinforced by S1, the Technical Manager, in Extract 3d:

Extract 3d – John and planning time (CANBEC M10)

1310 <S1> Well I think they get that from John.
1311 <S3> Mm.
1312 <S1> **(F) John who who who works out the amount of time it takes and shaves it in half …**

S1 is beginning to communicate his stance concerning who is responsible for the failure of the administrative processes and places it firmly at the feet of the co-director John.

A few turns later, S3 (Sales Manager) adds his voice to the discussion:

Extract 3e – John's perceptions of admin (CANBEC M10)

1323 <S3> Cos one of the problems I've had with John is that he doesn't think there is a lot of admin to do.

1324 <S2> **(F) That's cos he doesn't do it.**
1325 <S3> **(F) That's because he doesn't do it yeah. Any of it.**
1326 <S2> No.
1327 <S3> **(F) He gets other people to do it for him.**
1328 <S2> Correct.

Extract 3e shows S1 and S3 aligning with S2's stance regarding John. As one of the two owners of the company, John believes things are working satisfactorily. However, John is quickly coming to be seen as the catalyst for the rest of the team's poor attitudes to following the rules. The management team's view stands out most notably through the formulations in Turns 1325 and 1327, which transform the discussion to a disparaging remark asserting John's lack of interest or indeed insight into the core business processes.

Extracts 3c–e thus serve to illustrate the coming together of the three meeting participants, reinforced through the repeated use of formulations, and in their alignment of stance towards the failure to maintain company systems. Visually, this is perhaps best illustrated by the use of Du Bois's stance triangle. where it is possible to map the stance of multiple participants and the closing of the gap between their respective positions (Figure 4):

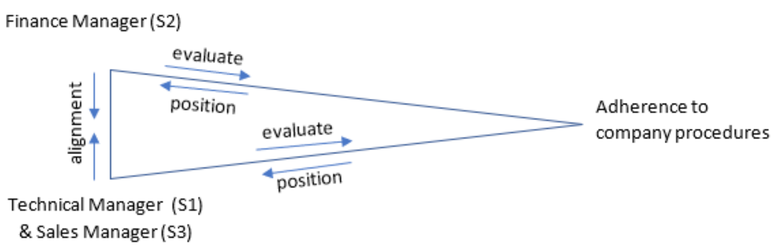

Figure 4: Adherence to company procedures

Finally, in Extract 3f, S2 formulates the point of the discussion and, by implication, her stance towards the company.

Extract 3f – If I worked in a real company (CANBEC M10)

1642 <S2> ⌊all the problems and it's the old old story. Whilst it's not broken don't fix it. The reality was and you'll often hear me say **(F)** ***if I worked in a real company***

1643 <S1> ⌊Yeah.
1644 <S2> ⌊***erm I wouldn't have to do this***. And when I'm training my team I often say **(F) "*You see this now. If you went and worked in another company and you operated Dell or Ebend you wouldn't do it this way*"**.

The stance of the Finance Manager is expressed through her frustrations towards her organization by comparing it to a "real company". Specifically, she articulates her stance towards how the company operates many of its financial processes and controls. She is clearly negative in her outlook, but "If I worked for a real company" and her final formulation "you wouldn't do it this way" mirror the stance of her two colleagues reflected in the extracts 3d–e.

The CANBEC M10 case study and its extracts 3a–f assisted in developing a picture of the meeting as it evolved over the course of approximately one hour. It identified the use of hypothetical talk and illustrated how information may be imparted and stance communicated when formulations are employed to make sense of the meeting talk, incorporating HT into evaluative summaries, discursively realized as formulations. The meeting progressed from what may be described as frivolous and unimportant discussions to those in which the managers needed to address whether or not the business of the organization was being conducted efficiently. The extracts illustrated how through the use of HT and formulations stance begins to be communicated. Finally, it also documented that by the conclusion of the meeting the three managers started to align in their stance regarding the organization and the perhaps cavalier attitude of its co-owner.

In summary, the data extracts described both the informal, and perhaps irrelevant, talk opening the meeting and that of the more important interactions that followed. There were distinct differences in the patterning of the status-value-relevance functions and ultimately also in their overall evaluation and contribution to the progression of the meeting. The status function of hypothetical talk was low in certainty throughout the meeting, whereas HT had a high score in terms of value and relevance when discussing key topics. Irrespective of the topic under review and its overall importance to the meeting, it was possible to track the stance of the participants through their utterances, be they real or hypothetical.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this article was to determine whether hypothetical talk contributes to the formation of stance and has the potential to advance organizational action. If it does, how do speakers formulate HT and evaluate what is meant by the other speakers. We argued that although the meeting talk may be hypothetical, the stance communicated is real. To analyze how stance related to hypothetical talk is communicated in business meetings, we have drawn on Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle. This model helped us embrace the interactional nature of stancetaking and determine the relationship between stance and evaluation. We then overlaid Du Bois's notion of interactional stancetaking with Hunston's (1989, 1994) three-function evaluation model which we found to be rigorous in how it approaches the analysis of evaluation in texts.

In the analysis, we attempted to adhere to Hunston's (2011: 10) fundamental proposition which asserts that while the act of evaluation "may be purely private and unexpressed (in which case it lies outside a study of language)" its linguistic expression (through words, phrases, etc.) ensures that it becomes analyzable. Hunston's status-value-relevance evaluation model thus created an opportunity to further complement Du Bois's triangle and expand how evaluation can be considered in order for the participants to develop their opinions and communicate their stance. The continua of the three functions proposed by Hunston were applied to the analysis and were represented graphically (Tables 1–3). Hunston's model offered layers of interpretation; it provided a tool for analyzing the degree of certainty expressed towards a proposition by a speaker (status), the positive or negative value attributed towards it and the relevance to the issue at hand. A turn-by-turn analysis subsequently traced the interlocutors' reactions to the expressed stance and examined whether or not they aligned with it.

Through the case study, we were thus able to illustrate the dynamism of stancetaking in business meetings in that: evaluation is a continually evolving process and the three functions of evaluation can alter depending on the knowledge either held by or made available to the individuals. It was the combined impact of the three functions which ultimately informed the ongoing actions of participants. At the outset of the paper, this evaluative approach was particularly concerned with hypothetical talk, which, on the face of it, may fare poorly where the talk is known to be possibly unreliable and as a consequence could be considered to have little value or relevance to the meeting. However, the model – when applied to the evaluation of hypothetical talk – demonstrated that this was not the case and assisted us in addressing our initial question of how meeting participants evaluate talk which has been introduced to the meeting as hypothetical.

Specifically, Hunston's model highlighted that in situations where the status function of the information qualifies as uncertain (e.g., if it is expressed through HT), a parallel evaluation of value and relevance overrides its potentially negative impact. Moreover, if this finding is aligned with Du Bois's stance triangle, it becomes apparent on which basis participants gauge their considerations in order to continue the conversation, and in doing so, begin to communicate their stance in respect of the topic, relationship and alignment – or lack of it – towards their fellow participants.

In the data, it was demonstrated that hypothetical talk is an established and well-understood discursive practice on which meetings' participants regularly draw. Interlocutors understand this and take it into account both when offering contributions and evaluating hypothetical talk. This conversational behaviour coupled with the key aims of business meetings was observed to be highly effective in achieving meaningful action and organizational goals.

Finally, formulations – either as an act of sense-making or as an evaluative summary concluding a sequence of talk, including hypothetical talk – were ubiquitous in the interactions. By applying both Hunston's and Du Bois's models and overlaying them with a CA approach, the interpretation of the formulations assisted in determining the stance adopted by the meeting participants and helped to understand how the outcomes of meetings were achieved.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those who kindly allowed us to collect the CCI data, to Michael Handford for advising us on the CANBEC corpus data, and to the anonymous reviewers for providing helpful comments on editing the paper.

Transcription conventions

Markers of hypotheticality are underlined
HT is in *italics*
Formulations are in **bold**

< >	Speaker names are in angled brackets
…	part of turn or a number of turns ellipted
(…)	noticeable pause or break of less than 1 second within a turn
– –	sound abruptly cut off, e.g. false start
/?/	indicates inaudible utterances
/ /	words between slashes show uncertain transcription
└	overlapping or simultaneous speech (the exact onset of overlap is not shown)
( )	non-linguistic information, e.g. pauses of 1 second or longer, gestures, actions, anonymized identities

Additional conventions for CCI data

.	falling intonation at the end of a turn, or at the end of a tone unit/"sentence" within a turn
,	slightly rising intonation at end of a turn, or at the end of a tone unit within a turn, e.g. showing continuation
?	high rising intonation at end of a turn or "sentence"
:	indicate elongated vowel, e.g. *a:h*
[ ]	utterances or back-channel responses interjected by a speaker/speakers within another speaker's turn

Note: In the CANBEC punctuation does not reflect intonation. Full stops mark turn completion and a question mark indicates the utterance is a question.

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